

# LINCOLN LORE

No. 50

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

March 24, 1930

## LINCOLN LORE

BULLETIN OF  
THE LINCOLN  
HISTORICAL  
RESEARCH  
FOUNDATION



ENDOWED BY  
THE LINCOLN  
NATIONAL LIFE  
INSURANCE  
COMPANY

Dr. Louis A. Warren - - - Editor

### HANKS AND HAWKS

The identification of the Hanks family, from which Abraham Lincoln's mother descended, is one of the most baffling problems in America genealogy.

John Locke Scripps prepared a biography of Lincoln in 1860, in which he depended largely upon source material furnished by the Presidential Nominee. He has this to say about Lincoln's mother:

"Facts in the possession of the writer have impressed him with the belief that although of but limited education, she was a woman of great native strength of intellect and force of character and he suspects that those admirable qualities of head and heart which characterized her distinguished son are inherited mostly from her."

If it be admitted that the maternal line of Lincoln's ancestors contributed some innate tendencies which found expression in his intellectual and moral development, it would appear to be of utmost importance to discover, if possible, something about these forebears.

One of the most confusing problems confronting those who have done original research work, in communities where Hanks families are known to have lived, is the spelling of the name.

When Mrs. Eleanor Gridley, secretary of the Lincoln Log Cabin Association, visited Coles County, Illinois, in the summer of 1891, she heard and recorded many bits of Lincoln family folk lore.

On one occasion she was discussing the tradition that the President did not know who was his mother's father. She was told that Lincoln asked Dennis Hanks about this question and Dennis told him: "His mother's name was Hawks, and not Hanks, and that the name had changed after they came to Kentucky." In a footnote Mrs. Gridley states that: "This statement was corroborated by Dennis Hanks upon whom I made a second brief call." Hence, it would appear that there was in the tradition of the Hanks family some question whether the early spelling of the family name was Hawks or Hanks.

Four years after Mrs. Gridley's extended visit in Coles County, Illinois, Mrs. Caroline Hanks Hitchcock made a pilgrimage into Virginia in quest of information about the Hanks family. Here she found the same confusion of names suggested in the Gridley tradition. After studying the problem, she came to the conclusion that the spelling Hawks and Hanks were interchangeable in many instances, and referred to the same family.

Several years ago the editor of Lincoln Lore made a hurried trip through Virginia and photographed some of the documents which clearly revealed the interchangeable spelling of the family name. This past summer he made a more careful and painstaking pilgrimage to certain county court houses in Virginia, with the idea in mind of gathering all available information on the spelling of this name.

He is convinced, after compiling this evidence and referring to other contemporaneous data, that the spelling of the name Hank, Hanke, Hanks, Hanks, Hancks, and Hanckes, in practically every community, is spelled so

#### Various Forms of Spelling Hanks

Hangt	Hancks	Hawke
Hangat	Hank	Hawkes
Hanch	Hanke	Hawks
Hanck	Hanks	Hengst
Hancke	Hanks	Hengist
Hanckes	Hawk	Hengist

that the "n" appears to be a "w" in the first four instances. This is caused by a peculiar method of finishing the letter "n" with an upward stroke before its connection with the beginning stroke of the letter "k."

That there were families in Virginia who consistently spelled their name Hawks, cannot be denied, but the coincidence of their living in the same community with a family named Hanks, has not as yet been confirmed.

More than 35 years ago Mrs. Hitchcock corresponded with W. G. Stanard, of Virginia State Library, with reference to doing some research work on the Hanks family. The correspondence which passed between Mrs. Hitchcock and Mr. Stanard is now before me and it reveals the first attempt of a systematic effort to locate the Virginia Hanks family. It records the appearance of a Thomas Hanck, whose name is later spelled Hanckes and which then seemed to be the most consistent form, settling on the Rappahannock River as early as 1654. A Robert Hanks who came a few years later and settled on the same river passed away by October 6, 1691, when his will was probated and Margaret Hanckes made the executrix. The

names of these Hanks families are spelled by the recorder in various ways.

Up in New England Mrs. Hitchcock had discovered another family of Hankses, the first settler being John Hanks, who was in Plymouth as early as 1632. One does not find the same interchangeable spelling in the Hanks name in New England as he does in Virginia.

Still another group of Hanks families located near Philadelphia. They were from Sawley, England, and the earliest spelling of the name seems to be Hank. Luke Hank was in Philadelphia as early as 1688 and there were other members of the family associated with him.

One branch of this Philadelphia Hank family seems to be quite consistent in spelling their name Hank; occasionally it will close with an "e." Some members of this family, however, later adopted the spelling of the name Hanks.

It was undoubtedly a descendant of the Philadelphia Hank family who finally migrated into Rockingham County, Virginia, where the most simple form of the spelling of the name "Hank" seems to have been retained.

In Hampshire County there was a Joseph Hanks living in 1782; the name Hawk also appears here in two or three instances. One clerk seemed to have much difficulty in spelling the name of a John Hanks, or Hawks, who was living there in 1789, and other instances of the interchangeable letter are observed.

It is in Amelia County, Virginia, where there seems to be the most confusion in the spelling of the Hanks name. Records spelling the name, Hawks have been discarded by some historians as having no bearing on the Hanks question. I am convinced after having spent two days in Amelia County and carefully examining the original manuscripts, that all of the early records which use different forms of both the Hank and Hawk stems refer to the same family.

While I doubt that the letter called a "w" was ever recognized as a "w" by the early tribe, yet it is apparent in later entries that some of the descendants did continue to use this peculiar spelling quite consistently. They may have possibly pronounced the name Hawks instead of Hanks, until an entirely new name was borne by members of the original Hanks family.

From time to time this bulletin will publish biographical sketches of different branches of the Hanks families, hoping eventually to establish beyond a doubt the maternal ancestry of the President.

Note: Copies of Lincoln Lore Numbers 9, 28, 29, and 35 have touched upon Hanks history.